

The Outlook

A Running Commentary on Air Topics

The Johannesburg Race

WITH a possibility of winning some £7,000 it is to be expected that a large number of aeroplanes will be entered for the London-Johannesburg race which is due to start from London on September 15. A very great deal will depend upon the details of the regulations. Suitably framed, they may produce a splendid list of entries; indifferent regulations may reduce the list to very small proportions.

Accepting the statement which has been made, that the largest prize, of £4,000, is to go to the machine making the fastest time, it is possible, theoretically, to select right away a few machines as likely winners. There will be no time to design new aeroplanes after the regulations have been announced, and the most that can be hoped for is that some types which have been designed, but construction of which has been shelved owing to pressure of other work, may be rushed through in time for the race. That, however, is likely to be an isolated case.

Probably the fastest type possibly eligible for the race is the Bristol 142. This machine was built originally as a commercial aeroplane but was afterwards fitted with more powerful engines and purchased by Lord Rothermere, who presented it to the R.A.F., and it now carries the service "rings." It is, perhaps, doubtful that the machine would be accepted as a civil type for the race, even if the R.A.F. were willing to release it. Should it be a starter, however, it will almost certainly be the winner, barring accidents. The De Havilland Comet is probably the second favourite.

Next in speed come such types as the Airspeed Envoy, the Blackburn H.S.T.10, which should be finished in good time for the race, the Monospar Croydon and the Avro 652. All these types have top speeds in the neighbourhood of 200 m.p.h. and their performances are sufficiently close together to produce a keen race over such a long course, on which good navigation may well make up for a slight deficiency in speed as compared with a faster machine slightly less well navigated.

The handicap race is so much influenced by handicap allowances and possible effects of commercial feature allowances that it would be idle to speculate on the chances of any particular type.

Without Subsidy?

THE final judgment on the central London airport idea was not the only interesting feature of Lord Swinton's speech at Gatwick. The taxpayer, he said, would go on backing civil flying so long as he was sure that the money was spent on plans the ultimate object of which was to make air transport pay its own way. The time when that would come about might, he said, be nearer than some people thought.

That is almost a prophecy, and, as the saying is, it gives one furiously to think. The Air Ministry has just persuaded the House of Commons to give it authority to pay increased subsidies to Imperial Airways and other air companies. The need for this increase has been generally conceded.

None the less, in certain circumstances air transport can be made to pay on its own merits. One may feel certain that the shareholders of Railway Air Services are not exactly anxious to lose money, and they have just announced a new and greatly expanded programme for this summer. One-fifth of the shares in R.A.S. are held

by Imperial Airways, which receives subsidies in respect of some, but not all, of its services. The rest are held by the four great railway companies, which are not subsidised concerns. In fact, the amount of public money which reaches the operations of R.A.S. is very diluted.

There is, however, a painful moral to be drawn from the history of certain British shipping companies. Subsidised foreign lines have obliged them to appeal to the British Government to help them. If British air transport ever comes to "fly by itself," can we be sure that foreign nations will not continue to subsidise their national lines, and so force Great Britain, willy-nilly, to follow suit?

Union is Economy

YET another point in Lord Swinton's Gatwick speech is worthy of comment. He made a strenuous *apologia* for the grouping together of civil and Service flying under one Ministry. *Flight* has more than once pointed out that this arrangement does not mean the subordination of civil to R.A.F. interests. The Director-General of Civil Aviation is in a very independent position, and the Air Members of the Air Council have no power, even if they had the inclination, to interfere with him. Lord Swinton, however, did not content himself with showing that there are no vices in the system. He claimed absolute merits for it, in particular the great merit of economy in administration.

Aeronautical progress now depends on research more than on anything else, and research is sometimes very expensive. The Air Minister mentioned one case in which both the civil side and the R.A.F. side of the Air Ministry were clamouring for expensive research programmes to be undertaken. He called the heads of both together, and a programme was drawn up which satisfied the requirements of both and saved the country several thousand pounds. The moral is that the present arrangement is a good one.

West African Possibilities

NOW that Air France is carrying passengers over part of its mail run to South America, it might be a particularly apt moment to ask why we, with our West African possessions, have not yet considered it desirable to operate a service over this route—carried, of course, a few stages farther.

Imperial Airways have already reached Kano from the main trunk route, and in due course Elders Colonial Airways will take over the balance of the service to the Gold Coast. For the inhabitants of Sierra Leone, Ashanti and even Nigeria, however, this roundabout route would hardly appear to be economical either in time or money.

During the past two years, and even within recent weeks, there have been both statements and rumours concerning West African services, Cape services down the west coast of Africa, and South Atlantic services. If properly and effectively run, such services would merit official financial support—and obviously they could not hope to be an immediately economic proposition unless they received a subsidy.

There is little doubt, however, that, if more than one company is, in fact, considering the idea, the Government will, in its own interests, demand that there should be co-operation, or even an amalgamation of interests, before making any offer of assistance.